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The Child's Voyage and the *Immram* Tradition in Lewis, Tolkien, and Pullman

Kris Swank

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Abstract

C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, and Philip Pullman have all written children's fantasies derived from the medieval Irish *immram*, or voyage tale, best known from the voyage tales of the Irish figures, Saint Brendan and Mael Duin. William Flint Thrall defined the *immram* as "a sea-voyage tale in which a hero, accompanied by a few companions, wanders about from island to island, meets Otherworld wonders everywhere, and finally returns to his native land." In Lewis's *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (1952), Lucy and Edmund Pevensie are joined by their ill-mannered cousin Eustace on a voyage to a number of marvelous islands in the Narnian ocean. In Tolkien's *Roverandom* (1998), an ill-mannered puppy named Rover is sent on a voyage to the moon and the Deep Blue Sea. In Pullman's *The Book of Dust, Volume One: La Belle Sauvage* (2017), two children, Malcolm and Alice, rescue the baby Lyra from the those who wish to control her. In a wild voyage down the flooded River Thames, they encounter a number of strange islands. But these stories are more than exciting adventure tales. The voyage also serves as a metaphor for the soul's moral testing. Thomas Owen Clancy describes the *immram* as "the saving of souls which use a voyage on the sea as the means of redemption." Eustace is transformed, literally and spiritually, and is redeemed in the course of his voyage. Likewise, Tolkien's Rover is transformed, literally and spiritually, and is redeemed. It is presumed that Pullman's Lyra is transformed by drinking fairy-milk (although the effects of this will not be seen until after the events of this novel). It is primarily Malcolm, however, who faces the moral challenges in Pullman's book. Yet, unlike Lewis and Tolkien, who write through a Christian lens, Pullman's agnostic/atheistic lens is not concerned with spiritual redemption, but, rather, with right action. Malcolm, in his particular circumstances, performs the right action to protect Lyra and Alice, and he is subsequently rewarded with a place at Jordan College, Pullman's analog of an earthly paradise. All three authors use the medieval *immram* structure and motifs to tell tales of transformation and personal growth. Lewis and Tolkien maintain the form's original purpose of depicting Christian redemption stories. Pullman inverts several of the genre's stock episodes and motifs, and thus subverts the *immram*'s original purpose, opting instead to depict a story of acting to save lives in the earthly realm.

Additional Keywords

Pullman, Philip; Otherworld; immram; voyage; Irish Language and Literature



THE CHILD'S VOYAGE AND THE *IODORAO* TRADITION IN LEWIS, TOLKIEN, AND PULLMAN

KRIS SUWANK

C.S. LEWIS, J.R.R. TOLKIEN, AND PHILIP PULLMAN have all written children's fantasies which involve voyages by water. In Lewis's *The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader"* (1952), the Pevensie children, Lucy and Edmund, are joined by their ill-mannered cousin Eustace Scrubb on a voyage to a number of islands in the Narnian ocean. In Tolkien's *Roverandom* (1998), an ill-mannered puppy named Rover is sent on a voyage to a number of locations on the moon and in the Deep Blue Sea. In Pullman's *The Book of Dust: Volume One, La Belle Sauvage* (2017), two children, Malcolm and Alice, embark on a dangerous river voyage to save the baby Lyra from those who wish to control her. In the process, they encounter a number of strange "islands": hilltops cresting above the flooded River Thames.

Readers of modern children's fantasy literature are familiar with the parameters of the epic quest, derived from medieval romance. Verlyn Flieger defines the quest as "a journey as perilous for soul as for body—with a fixed purpose, a goal beyond itself" (210). Arguably, the most famous modern fantasy quest is the expedition to destroy the One Ring in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-55). Other fantasy quests include Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950) and Pullman's *Northern Lights/The Golden Compass* (1995). Another tale-type Flieger analyzes is the *aventure*, a French term referring to "adventures" or "dangerous escapades" in a magical otherworld, "exciting for their own sake, ending in peace and prosperity" (210). This is more descriptive of the episodic adventures of Bilbo Baggins in Tolkien's *The Hobbit* (1937), Taran, the Assistant Pig-Keeper in Lloyd Alexander's *Taran Wanderer* (1967), and Alanna of Trebond in Tamora Pierce's *The Woman Who Rides Like a Man* (1986). In *aventures*, there is a goal, of sorts, but the narrative focus is on the protagonist's episodic adventures and, particularly in narratives featuring young protagonists, the lessons learned from each episode. As Flieger writes, both the quest and *aventure* "follow the traditional romance trajectory—a hero's journey and return," but the quest is more focused upon the goal, while the *aventure* is more focused upon the escapades (Flieger 210).

There are numerous examples of both tale-types; thus readers of modern fantasy may be accustomed to thinking in terms of the quest or episodic adventures in strange lands. Yet, there is a third type in modern fantasy literature derived from medieval literature which may be less familiar as a discrete class. Exemplified by the water voyages of Lewis, Tolkien, and Pullman, it is the Irish *immram*.¹ William Flint Thrall defined the *immram* as "a sea-voyage tale in which a hero, accompanied by a few companions, wanders about from island to island, meets Otherworld wonders everywhere, and finally returns to his native land" (quoted in Mac Mathúna 276). The *immram* protagonist is frequently a penitent or a pilgrim, and the voyage is a metaphor for spiritual growth and redemption. The island episodes, including a glimpse of, or visit to, a paradisiacal sanctuary, provide valuable lessons before the protagonist is instructed to return home and practice the lessons learned.

The best-known medieval examples include the vernacular Irish *Immram curaig Maíle Duin* ("The Voyage of Mael Duin's Boat") in which the warrior Mael Duin seeks vengeance on the marauders who killed his father. A great storm propels his ship into a region of otherworldly islands which he must negotiate before returning home. A related text is the Latin *Navigatio sancti Brendani abbatis* ("The Voyage of Saint Brendan the Abbot"), one of the most popular texts in the Middle Ages. In this story, the Christian Saint Brendan of Clonfert embarks on a sea-voyage with several of his brethren to seek the Promised Land of the Saints, where the blessed await God's final judgement. The voyage lasts seven years and encompasses several marvelous islands before the monks finally reach the Promised Land. Dorothy Ann Bray writes, "The monks' experiences on the sea prepare them for their destination [...] by encountering both dangerous and benign sea creatures, paradisaic islands with hidden perils, and other wonders of the deep which represent the trials and threats to their souls and the rewards which await them in the world to come" (176). In the Promised Land, the monks behold God's paradise on earth before they are told to return to Ireland and relate the wonders they have seen to others.

The French *aventure*, and its Irish analog, the *echtrae*, also feature an ultimate goal, usually a land of eternal youth and prosperity. However, Thrall writes, "The *immram* is marked off rather sharply from such other Celtic otherworld tales [...] by a centering of interest upon a prolonged adventurous voyage at sea rather than upon the experiences of a mortal in a single otherworld place" (15). In other words, as the epic quest is focused upon the goal, and the *aventure* is focused on the escapades, the *immram* is focused on the voyage and the island encounters. Additionally, several "stock episodes and motifs are

¹ *immram* (singular) or *immrama* (plural), pronounced IM-rav, literally means "rowing about."

shared between the medieval *immrama*" (Wooding, "Introduction" xii-xiii). Stock episodes include visits to empty mansions, holy hermits, ideal monastic communities, enchanted islands, and submarine Otherworlds, among others. Shared *immrama* motifs include a frame narrative, a crime which results in exile, a magical figure who sanctions the voyage, a barrier of mist or clouds, golden apples of youth, and a circular journey which ends where it began.

Lewis, Tolkien, and Pullman adapt several of these stock episodes and motifs in their own children's *immrama*. But these stories are more than exciting adventure tales on the high seas. The voyages also serve as metaphors for the spiritual growth of the protagonists. Thomas Owen Clancy describes this spiritual aspect as "the saving of souls which use a voyage on the sea as the means of redemption" (197). In the course of his voyage, Mael Duin's heart changes, and he returns home a penitent and forgiving man. Likewise, in each of these children's stories, a transformation of character occurs in at least one of the child voyagers. It is apparent that Lewis, Tolkien, and Pullman intentionally mimic the style and substance of the medieval Irish *immrama* through their focus on voyages over water, encounters with otherworld islands, and use of stock *immrama* episodes and motifs. Yet, it is the use of the voyage as a means for personal transformation which truly marks *The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader," Roverandom*, and *The Book of Dust: Volume One, La Belle Sauvage* as modern-day children's *immrama* in conversation with their medieval models, the voyages of St. Brendan and Mael Duin.

Despite spending his entire academic career in England at Oxford and Cambridge Universities, C.S. (Clive Staples) Lewis (1898-1963) was, in fact, an Ulsterman from Northern Ireland, "and at home in Irish lore and literature as a native son" (Lawyer 330). Lewis biographer George Sayer recounts how Lewis's nanny, Lizzie Endicott, read him many "fairy tales and also told him the stories she had heard in her own childhood in County Down" (43). This familiarity shows itself most clearly in *The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader,"* the third of Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia*.² Walter Hooper reproduces what is certainly an early conception of *The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader"* from "one of Lewis's notebooks [...] written in what looks like a very hurried hand, as if it were dashed off the moment it came into his head" (46). The bizarre plot revolving around a blood transfusion between a modern boy and a Narnian boy-king was jettisoned, but a few details from the notes survive in the published book, such as children getting through a magic painting and somehow arriving on board an ancient sailing ship. Lewis noted the children "[d]iscover presently that they

² Although the ordering currently used by the publisher of *The Chronicles of Narnia*, based on the internal chronology of the stories, places *The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader"* as volume five, it was the third volume which Lewis wrote, and the third to be published.

are sailing in time (backwards) [...] Various islands (of Odyssey and St. Brendan) can be thrown in [...]" (quoted in Hooper 46). In the story as published, Lucy and Edmund Pevensie, the siblings familiar to readers from previous adventures, are pulled through a painting of a ship at sea along with their odious cousin Eustace Scrubb.³ Plunged into a real sea, they are rescued by their old friend Caspian (now King of Narnia) and taken aboard his ship, the *Dawn Treader*. Caspian is searching the Narnian ocean for seven lords his uncle Miraz had exiled, but the ship will sail perhaps all the way to Aslan's paradisiacal country beyond World's End. David C. Downing argues that Lewis did not, in the end, make much use of Homer's epic poem, *The Odyssey*, but did draw major inspiration from "The Voyage of St. Brendan" (43). John Lawyer concurs that the story

stands clearly in the *immram* tradition, an allegory of a sea journey in pilgrimage to God. The two accounts [i.e. the *Dawn Treader's* and Brendan's] share many parallel episodes: islands of birds who speak with human voices, various holy islanders who provide help and further guidance, and springs with magical powers. [...] Both journeys also feature a feast in a great hall prepared by invisible hands, encounters with stranded sinners clothed only in their long hair, and narrow escapes from sea monsters. (330)

Lewis's story echoes both the Mael Duin story of righting old wrongs, and the Brendan story of the search for an earthly paradise.

J.R.R. (John Ronald Reuel) Tolkien (1892-1973) and Lewis were close friends, both serving on the English faculty at Oxford and participating in the informal Oxford literary group, the Inklings. Tolkien and Lewis often mined the same storehouse of medieval literature as inspiration for their fantasy fiction, and Tolkien re-visioned the Irish *immrama* material several times. In his Middle-earth fiction, the Promised Land becomes the earthly paradise of Valinor. In notes for *The Lost Road*, an abandoned time-travel story Tolkien worked on in or around 1936, the characters Ælfwine and Eadwine discuss "strange tales from Ireland" of a paradisiacal land found in the Northwest by the holy Brendan and Maelduin (Tolkien, *The Lost Road* 80). In *The Notion Club Papers*, another unfinished time-travel story that Tolkien worked on in 1945, the character Frankley recites a poem entitled "The Death of Saint Brendan," which is based on the *Navigatio* (Tolkien, *Sauron Defeated* [*Sauron*] 261-64).⁴ Frankley tells his

³ The previous adventures are *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and *Prince Caspian*.

⁴ "The Death of Saint Brendan" was later revised and published as "Imram" in *Time and Tide*, 3 Dec. 1955, p. 1561, and is reprinted, along with variant versions, in Tolkien, *Sauron*, pp. 261-64.

colleagues he had “read the *Navigatio Sancti Brendani*, of course, once upon a time, years ago” (*Sauron* 265). *The Notion Club Papers* also mentions “Maelduin who had sailed to new lands, and [...] holy Brendan and others” (*Sauron* 270). In *Roverandom*, Tolkien’s voyager is the puppy Rover, who is sent away to the moon and the Deep Blue Sea after he bites an irritable wizard, Artaxerxes, for taking his favorite ball. At first Rover (who becomes known as “Roverandom” for his wide wanderings) only wants to escape Artaxerxes, but eventually he discovers he must reconcile with the wizard if he ever hopes to return home. Near the end of his journey, Rover spies in the distance the fabled Elvenhome, an early/alternate name for Valinor. Thus, *Roverandom*, too, has echoes of both the Mael Duin story of revenge and reconciliation, and the Brendan story of the search for an earthly paradise. Although *Roverandom* was only published in 1998, twenty-five years after the author’s death, it was actually written in the 1920s to delight Tolkien’s young sons. It is the earliest-known fiction that Tolkien wrote for children, but he abandoned hopes of ever seeing the story in print when, in 1936, his publishers declined to publish it.⁵ The mention in Lewis’s notebook of his child protagonists sailing *backward* through time points to the possible influence of Tolkien’s own backward-time-travel narratives, *The Lost Road* and *The Notion Club Papers*. Tolkien may even have discussed *Roverandom* with Lewis, although there is no direct evidence. What is clear, however, is that Lewis and Tolkien shared an affinity for the voyage tales of Brendan and Mael Duin, and sought to pen their own *immrama* with modern-day child (or puppy) protagonists.

Philip Pullman (1946-) is best-known for the *His Dark Materials* trilogy, comprised of *Northern Lights/The Golden Compass* (1995/1996), *The Subtle Knife* (1997), and *The Amber Spyglass* (2000), and featuring a young girl named Lyra Belacqua. As Dan Stewart writes, the trilogy is primarily “set in a parallel universe where the supernatural is everyday; ageless witches exist alongside warrior polar bears; and every human has a ‘daemon,’ a kind of spirit animal with which it shares a soul” (52). Three short related works followed: *Lyra’s Oxford* (2003), *Once Upon a Time in the North* (2008), and *The Collectors* (2015). In 2017, Pullman returned to Lyra’s world, publishing the first volume of a new trilogy, *The Book of Dust: Volume One, La Belle Sauvage*. Set a decade before the events in *His Dark Materials*, Lyra is just six months old and the subject of a volatile prophecy by witches: “the child was destined to put an end to destiny” (Pullman, *La Belle Sauvage* [LBS] 350). This prophecy has the powerful (and increasingly-totalitarian) Church worried, and they send agents to find her. Counter-agents hide Lyra with the good nuns of Godstow Priory. Young

⁵ See Scull and Hammond’s excellent introduction to the history of *Roverandom* (Tolkien, *Roverandom*).

Malcolm Polstead, whose parents own The Trout Pub across the River Thames from Godstow, becomes Lyra's self-appointed protector. On the night of a cataclysmic storm, Malcolm, along with Alice, a girl who works in The Trout, spirits Lyra away from Godstow down the flooded Thames in his little canoe, *La Belle Sauvage*. They are hotly pursued by the demented Gerard Bonneville, presumed to be an agent of the Consistorial Court of Discipline (CCD), an enforcement arm of the Church. The desperate journey takes the children downstream, past an inundated landscape of gray sky and small hilltops floating above the flood like little islands.

Pullman was born in Norwich, England but spent much of his childhood overseas with his Royal Air Force family. Pullman credits his own experience as an originating factor in the plot of *La Belle Sauvage*. He recalls that in 1956, when he was nine or ten years old and living in South Australia, the Murray-Darling River Basin flooded—

I remember seeing it as wide as the horizon, a vast mass of grey water swept along and the wind was whipping it into waves and the power of it was just overwhelming and I was hugely impressed. That sense of being a minute little individual at the edge of this huge force of nature has never left me, and I think I was drawing on that memory as much as anything else. (Pullman, "Philip Pullman Interview" 7:36)

Stewart acknowledges Pullman's childhood flood-memory and also compares the flood in *La Belle Sauvage* to the biblical flood of Noah (52). Other commentators have likened Pullman's river voyage to Homer's *Odyssey* (Hand, p.C1), Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (Pullman's publisher, David Fickling, quoted in Wallace), Spenser's *Faerie Queene* and Ishiguro's *The Buried Giant* ("Open unto the fields" 84). Rowan Williams compares Lyra's escape and flight to "the murderous search for and miraculous rescue of the magical/holy/messianic child" stories of Moses and Jesus (39). The critics have generally acclaimed *La Belle Sauvage* for its deeper world-building of Lyra's alternate "Brytain" and the fast-paced action sequences. Yet, the long narrative river voyage—fully half of the book—has left some reviewers perplexed. Darren Stephens writes, "There is a dreamlike quality to a large part of the book's middle section, and a slightly more mystical feel than elsewhere [...]. If there's one slight criticism, it's that the middle section could have been compressed a little [...]." Williams was puzzled by two chapters he felt did not contribute anything to the flow of the story, "one involving a visit to an 'enchanted island' (with echoes of Alan Garner and of Tolkien in the idea of a respite in the journey thanks to an elvish princess), the other an episode in a country house inhabited by ghosts [...]. [I]t felt (uncharacteristically) like padding" (39). On the other hand, a few critics have recognized Pullman's traditional source material. Stewart acknowledges the

"mysterious, shadowy world inspired by British folklore" (53). Likewise, Melanie McDonagh acknowledges Pullman's debt to the *immrama*, writing, "like the voyages of St Brendan or that of C.S. Lewis's *Dawn Treader*, this one is interspersed with otherworldly episodes, in which the two youngsters enter the land of the faeries, or an enchanted island, or a mausoleum" (35). Thus, Lewis's *Voyage of the "Dawn Treader,"* Tolkien's *Roverandom*, and Pullman's *La Belle Sauvage* all illustrate the shared theme of a voyage to otherworld islands. But more than that, they also adopt the narrative structure, motifs, and even some specific episodes from the medieval *immrama*.

All *immrama* are "framework" tales: that is, the otherworld voyage occurs between a beginning and an ending episode set in the mundane world. The opening episode, the first half of the frame, establishes the purpose of the voyage—usually a crime, sin, or pilgrimage which propels the protagonist(s) into exile at sea, as sanctioned by a religious or magical figure. Clancy observes that Mael Duin is born of violence when a warrior rapes a nun (204). Nevertheless, Mael Duin is constrained by his society's mores to avenge his father's own violent death at the hands of marauders. Sanctioned by the wizard, Nuca, Mael Duin builds a boat, assembles a crew, and sets out to find the killers. Saint Brendan's story is generally not associated with a commencing crime. Rather, it is associated with an overwhelming desire to undertake a pilgrimage to the wondrous Promised Land of the Saints after hearing about it from the mystical Saint Barrind.⁶ Receiving a blessing from the holy father Enda, Brendan sets out to sea with some of his brethren. However, in a Dutch version of the story, Brendan disbelieves an account of God's natural wonders, so he is commanded by an angel to sail the seas for nine years as penance, in order to discover first-hand "what is true and what is not" (Gerritsen and King 107). This version suggests a penitential motive in the Latin version as well, and, in fact, Clancy observes "Penitential attitudes had much to do with both the self-willed exile of the pilgrim and the enforced exile of the criminal" (200). In both circumstances, one was cut off from kin and society, and at the mercy of the same wind and weather.

Lewis, Tolkien, and Pullman each employ this narrative structure: a commencing crime, sin, or desire for pilgrimage which initiates a fantastic voyage. In *The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader,"* siblings Lucy and Edmund are discussing their nostalgia for Narnia when their cousin Eustace taunts them for playing a child's game of make-believe. Like the Dutch Brendan, Eustace does

⁶ Barrind, or Barinthus, also appears in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Vita Merlini* as the supernatural ferryman who takes the wounded Arthur to the Island of Afallach (i.e. Avalon). He may be associated with the Irish seagod Manannán mac Lír, who has affiliations with *Tír na nÓg* ("The Land of Youth") as well as the weather and the mist between the worlds.

not believe in magical lands. All three children are soon pulled into a painting of a ship at sea—a portal to Narnia—where the lion-god, Aslan, has called them to join the crew of the *Dawn Treader*. Their friend King Caspian is seeking to rescue seven lords that his usurping uncle Miraz had exiled.⁷ Their friend Reepicheep, the warrior-mouse, is on a pilgrimage to fulfil a prophecy from his childhood:

*Where sky and water meet,
Where the waters grow sweet,
Doubt not, Reepicheep,
To find all you seek,
There is the Utter East.*

(Lewis, *The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader"* [VDT] 2.16)

The entire range of *immrama*-initiating motives is present here. Reepicheep, like the Latin Brendan, is on a pilgrimage to a promised land. Eustace, like the Dutch Brendan, is guilty of the sin of disbelief. Caspian, like Mael Duin, is seeking to right old wrongs. Tolkien's puppy Rover is, like Mael Duin, out for revenge when he bites the wizard, Artaxerxes. In retaliation, the wizard punishes Rover by turning him into a toy dog. Rover runs away from his human family and encounters a beneficent sand-sorcerer, Psamathos, who sends him on a voyage to the moon in order to avoid the vengeful Artaxerxes. In another example, Pullman's Malcolm Polstead is warned by a premonition of the "gyptian" Coram van Texel (Fader Coram from *His Dark Materials*) that soon, "there'll be the biggest flood anyone's seen for a hundred years. And not a normal flood either. [...] There's things in the water been disturbed, and things in the sky too, and they're both clear and bright to them as can read the signs. [...] Be ready" (*LBS* 214). Gerard Bonneville and the authoritarian Church are after the baby Lyra for the witches' prophecy about her. The night the storm breaks, Bonneville breaks into Godstow Priory, but Malcolm and Alice take Lyra and flee down-river. In each case, protagonists in the mundane world (Ireland, or a version of England) are involved with a crime, sin, or desire for pilgrimage which drives them on a voyage. Mael Duin, Brendan, and the denizens of the *Dawn Treader* go to sea, while the children in *La Belle Sauvage* take to the River Thames. Rover travels through space (an analog of the sea in Tolkien's early legendarium) as well as on and under the sea. Furthermore, each voyage is initiated by a magical figure: the wizard Nuca, Saint Enda (or the angel), Aslan, Psamathos the Sand Sorcerer, or the gyptian Coram van Texel.

⁷ Miraz usurped the throne of Narnia from his young nephew, Caspian, but Caspian reclaimed his crown when Miraz was defeated in the previous Narnian chronicle, *Prince Caspian*.

Next, the *immrama* voyagers pass through a barrier of mist or fog, a violent storm, or other strange weather, as indicative of the threshold to the Otherworld. In *The Voyage of Saint Brendan*, Barrind describes the approach to the Promised Land: “a fog so thick covered us that we could scarcely see the poop or the prow of the boat. But when we had spent about an hour like this a great light shone all around us” (O’Meara 27). Rover passes through a similar boundary of mist followed by shining light as he flies on the back of Mew the seagull: “a mist was on the sea [...]. Then above the mist, far out across the sea, the moon rose round and yellow and began to lay its shining path on the water” (Tolkien, *Roverandom* [*Roverandom*] 2.18-19). As Mael Duin’s boat approaches the island fort of his father’s killers, “a great wind” drives it into a region of strange islands (Stokes, *Mael Duin Part I* [MD I] 463). The *Dawn Treader* is also beset by a violent storm, whereafter the crew find themselves in a region even the Narnians think of as wondrous and strange. In *La Belle Sauvage*, when the predicted violent storm arrives, it sweeps Malcolm’s canoe into otherworldly regions, strange even for his world of daemons and talking polar bears. The gyptians, an insular culture especially sensitive to natural and supernatural phenomena, refer to “the flood and all its effects [as] part of the *secret commonwealth*” (LBS 459, emphasis added). *The Secret Commonwealth: Of Elves, Fauns, and Fairies* is a collection of folklore on Celtic fairies collected by Scottish clergyman, Robert Kirk in 1691-92.⁸ Thus the gyptians identify the storm and its resulting flood as liminal events which will open the door to the Otherworld.

Another feature of the *immrama* may be that the goal of the journey is initially denied until such time as the protagonist proves worthy. Brendan sails for seven years before he is granted access to the Promised Land of the Saints. A youth who meets Brendan there explains, “You could not find it immediately because God wanted to show you his varied secrets in the great ocean” (O’Meara 63). The “great wind” that comes upon Mael Duin’s boat drives it away from the marauders’ fort and over the sea (MD I 463). Mael Duin and his crew must journey to more than thirty other islands before they find their enemy’s fortress again. When Tolkien’s Rover begins his journey, Mew the Seagull flies him over the Isle of Dogs, a sort of earthly paradise Mew describes as, “where all the lost dogs go that are deserving or lucky” (*Roverandom* 2.20). Rover is eager to see it, but is not allowed to visit there until after his adventures on the moon convince him that his place is actually with the human family he had abandoned. Pullman’s child protagonists are also initially denied their goal. Malcolm and Alice try to row Lyra to Jordan College in Oxford where they hope she will be granted sanctuary from Bonneville and the CCD. However, the way is blocked

⁸ *The Secret Commonwealth* is also the title of Pullman’s second volume in *The Book of Dust* series (October 2019).

by fallen buildings and raging waters, and the children are forced to sail down the Thames toward London instead. Like other *immrama* voyagers, the children must experience marvels and dangers before they can reach their initial goal of Jordan College.

At this point in the narratives, the protagonists begin their encounters with a number of otherworldly islands. It is apparent that Lewis, Tolkien, and Pullman are consciously echoing several of the *immrama* stock episodes. Previous studies of *The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader"* and *Roverandom* provide more detailed analysis of those works as *immrama*.⁹ Here, the emphasis is on *immrama* locations common to Lewis, Tolkien, and Pullman, such as the island of the miraculous feast, islands inhabited by holy hermits or monastic communities, islands of enchanting women, and the undersea realm, in addition to the earthly paradise.

One typical *immrama* location common to all three modern authors is the empty mansion where a lavish feast and comfortable beds have been prepared for the voyagers by invisible hosts. Dorothy Ann Bray writes of the Brendan story, "Their first port of call takes them to a mysterious house where they find food and rest, and a moral trial, which one brother fails, with regard to worldly treasures and covetousness" (Bray 180). In both of the medieval stories of Brendan and Mael Duin, the voyagers arrive in great need at unpeopled mansions where, mysteriously, food and drink have been prepared as if the travelers had been expected. Brendan and his crew are welcomed by a dog; Mael Duin is welcomed by a cat, but in both situations, no humans are around. "Hath this been left for *us*?" Mael Duin asks (MD I 479). Bray argues that this miraculous provision of food and shelter serves "to reinforce the idea of the bounty of God's mercy and grace which refreshes them in need" (182). Near the end of their journey in *The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader,"* the crew finds a mysterious table "set out [with] such a banquet as had never been seen" (VDT 13.165). Three ancient men at the table are locked in a magical slumber, and the *Dawn Treader* crew wonder if the food is enchanted. They are soon joined by a beautiful woman (the daughter of Ramandu, a retired star) who assures them that the food and wine are wholesome and have been set there by Aslan's bidding for weary travelers (VDT 13.174). In *Roverandom*, Rover's guide on the moon is another dog, echoing the guardian dog in the Brendan story. Each day Rover and the moon-dog go off exploring together and return at evening to the Man in the Moon's white tower where they "always found their dinner just ready, as if they had arranged a time, but they seldom saw or heard the Man about" (*Roverandom* 2.30). In *La Belle Sauvage*, the children come upon a deserted

⁹ See, for example, Lawyer on *The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader,"* Swank on *Roverandom*, and Huttar on the *Inklings* in general.

pharmacy with an upper chamber that is dry above the floodwater. Pullman writes, "It was as good as a treasure-house. In the storeroom was everything needed for baby care, and medicines of all sorts, and even biscuits and various kinds of juice" (*LBS* 326).

While the empty mansion of *immram* tradition provides physical and spiritual refreshment, it also offers the temptation of material desire. Brendan cautions his brethren, "Make sure that none of you takes anything belonging to this island with him" (O'Meara 32). Yet one of the monks steals a silver bridle and pays for it with his life. One of Mael Duin's foster brothers likewise attempts to steal a necklace and is immediately burned to ash by the mysterious guardian cat (MD I 479). In *The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader,"* the ancient sleepers at Aslan's Table fell into enchanted slumber when they quarreled and grabbed the Stone Knife which had once slain Aslan himself. At another seemingly empty mansion on Dufflepud Island, Lucy is also tempted when she reads a spell in the Magician's Book which allows her to know what her friends think of her. Aslan soon appears and chastises Lucy for eavesdropping. This, significantly, is the same offence (eavesdropping) that Eustace commits at the book's beginning. Although Lucy does not lose her life for falling prey to temptation, she does lose her friendship with the girl on whom she eavesdropped. Eustace also succumbs to temptation when he steals a bracelet from a dead dragon's hoard. He is magically transformed into a dragon and cannot be changed back until he repents of his misdeeds. On the other hand, in *La Belle Sauvage*, Malcolm passes the moral test against covetousness when need drives him to take a considerable amount of the pharmacy's stock, but he leaves a note with his name and address and a promise to pay for what he took.

One of the *immram* protagonist's greatest allies is the holy hermit. For Brendan, this is Paul the Spiritual who has lived alone on a small island for eighty years, largely subsisting on spring-water or whatever God provides, and wearing no other garment but his own long hair, "For he was entirely covered by his hair from his head and beard and other hair down to his feet, and all the hair was white as snow on account of his great age" (O'Meara 60). Paul succours Brendan and his brethren, and at the end of their seven-year journey, he guides them to the Promised Land. In *The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader,"* Ramandu, the retired star, is also such a holy hermit. Lucy perceives him "like an old man. His silver beard came down to his bare feet in front and his silver hair hung down to his heels" (VDT 14.176). Although Ramandu wears a fleece robe rather than just his own hair, he, too, partakes of no other food than what God provides. Each morning he is fed by a single bird carrying "a fire-berry from the valleys in the Sun, and each fire-berry takes away a little of [his] age" (VDT 14.180). Like Paul, Ramandu succours the crew of the *Dawn Treader* in the final stage of their journey to World's End. *Roverandom's* Man in the Moon is a similar hermit

described as “an old man with a long silvery beard” (*Roverandom* 2.22). Likewise, he provides Rover with sanctuary, sustenance, and logistical support. There is no strictly equivalent figure in *La Belle Sauvage*, although two characters may serve as inverted analogues. As Malcolm, Alice, and Lyra float down the flooded Thames, they encounter a man in possession of a large stately house on one of the hill-islands. He begrudgingly allows them to stop and feed Lyra, but he will not allow them to stay long. Malcolm thinks the man killed the original occupants and seized the manor house for himself. The flood has become “a kind of between-time. Like a dream or something” (*LBS* 465). It is a time “when everything was upside down” (*LBS* 388-389). Thus, the upside down of a holy hermit who sustains himself on what God provides and succors weary travelers, is the man who seizes another's property by force and fails to give aid to travelers. When Bonneville arrives close on the children's trail, he kills the man, and the children must fight Bonneville themselves, before escaping back to their canoe. They do receive food and shelter at the next island, where they find Malcolm's old friend, the poacher, George Boatwright. He and some other refugees from the flood have been hiding from Church authorities in a cave. But here, too, the children ultimately fail to find relief as one of the refugees betrays Lyra to the Church. Pullman inverts the *immram* motif of the holy hermit by having both the stately house and the hermit's cave serve as places of betrayal rather than sustenance.

In addition to holy hermits, protagonists of the Irish *immrama* may also visit islands inhabited by religious orders who exemplify the virtues of communal living. Bray writes, “Several of the islands visited by Brendan and his crew contain monasteries of some sort which offer an illumination of Irish monasticism. Each island is also a kind of earthly paradise in the monastic sense” (Bray 179). At the Island of Saint Ailbe, Brendan encounters “a perfect community living according to the rule of silence; their only sound is singing praises to God, according to the proper office. None of the monks suffer from illness or desire, all their food and clothing is miraculously provided for them, and their lamps are lit by a spiritual light, a forerunner of the light to be found in the Land of Promise” (Bray 181). Tolkien humorously inverts the monastery island in *Roverandom* with the Isle of Dogs, a kind of earthly paradise for lost dogs who are deserving or lucky. Unlike the silent monks of St. Ailbe, the lost dogs “can make as much noise as they like without anyone telling them to be quiet or throwing anything at them” (*Roverandom* 2.20). Yet, here, too, the dogs are miraculously provided with food. Mew the seagull tells Rover, “there are bone-trees there, too, with fruit like juicy meat-bones that drops off the trees when it's ripe” (*Roverandom* 2.20). Lewis also presents an inverted example of the perfect monastic community on the island of the Dufflepuds, a race so silly they do not know how to behave wisely. The magician, Coriakin, a disgraced

star living in exile, is the analogue of the monastic abbot. Coriakin despairs of the Dufflepuds' stupidity, impatiently "waiting for the day when they can be governed by wisdom instead of this rough magic" (VDT 11.137).¹⁰ Whereas Tolkien and Lewis humorously invert Brendan's perfect monastic community, Pullman subverts it entirely. When Lyra is seized in Boatwright's camp by a paramilitary unit of the Church, she is taken to the Sisters of Holy Obedience. Their priory sits on one of the hill-islands situated above the floodwater. Unlike the kindly sisters of Godstow Priory, where Lyra was sheltered before the flood, the Sisters of Holy Obedience use corporal punishment. And unlike the good brothers of St. Ailbe in the Brendan story, the sisters imprison their charges until they are sixteen years old and then sell them into service. Malcolm, however, is able to rescue Lyra from the Sisters, and return her to Alice in the waiting canoe.

The *immrama* may also feature an island of fairy enchantment and, in the Christian sense, a distraction from the search for an earthly paradise. Both Mael Duin on his voyage and Bran in the medieval Irish *Voyage of Bran* visit islands inhabited by fairy women who weave enchantments to keep them. It seemed to Bran and his crew that they stayed a year in the Land of Women, where each sailor had a bed and a woman of his own, but in the mundane world, "it chanced to be many years" (Meyer 30). By the time Bran returned to Ireland, his voyage was already ancient history. Mael Duin experiences a similar timeslip, and he can only escape by finally cutting the magic thread that binds him to the fairy queen (as well as cutting off the hand of the man who holds the thread!). Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia* feature similar perilous fairy women who hold men in thrall—the White Witch and the Lady of the Green Kirtle—but not in *The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader."* In *Roverandom*, there are fairies of the diminutive kind which Tolkien would later come to "fervently dislike."¹¹ In the Deep Blue Sea, Rover encounters sea-fairies driving "shell-carriages harnessed to the tiniest fishes; or else they ride astride little green crabs with bridles of fine threads" (*Roverandom* 4.73). On the surface of the Moon, saccharine moon-gnomes ("moonums") "ride about on rabbits, and make pancakes out of snowflakes" (*Roverandom* 3.49). There are none of Tolkien's stately Elves in *Roverandom* unless they be in far-off Elvenhome, which Rover once glimpses in the distance (*Roverandom* 4.74). Of the three works discussed here, only

¹⁰ The phrase "this rough magic" comes from a speech by the magician Prospero in William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Act V, Scene 1 where Prospero vows to break his staff and abjure magic. Like Coriakin, Prospero has been marooned on a remote island for many years.

¹¹ Christopher Tolkien wrote of his father's poem "Goblin Feet" (which also features "'elfin' diminutiveness"), "my father said in 1971: 'I wish the unhappy little thing, representing all that I came (so soon after) to fervently dislike, could be buried forever'" (Tolkien, *Book of Lost Tales, Part One* 32).

Pullman's fully employs the medieval motif of an island inhabited by a dangerous enchantress. After Malcolm, Alice, and Lyra flee from the Sisters of Holy Obedience they see that, "A wooded hilltop rose out of the water, a little island all on its own, brightly lit by the low-lying moon. The air was warm, and there was a softness about it, almost a fragrance" (*LBS* 437). As anyone knows who remembers Bilbo Baggins's exclamation upon entering the valley of Rivendell in Tolkien's *The Hobbit*—"Hmmm! it smells like elves!"—the realm of fairies is fragrant and frequently found in woodland (3.58).¹² Fairy realms also have a soporific effect. The companions of Brendan and Mael Duin fall into enchanted slumbers after drinking fairy beverages (O'Meara 43; MD I 487, and Stokes, *Mael Duin, Part II* [MD II] 71). The dwarf Bombur, in Tolkien's *The Hobbit*, also falls into an enchanted sleep when he falls into the river of Mirkwood Forest. In *La Belle Sauvage*, Malcolm falls fast asleep the moment he lashes his canoe to a tree-branch on the enchanted island. As Bran and Mael Duin discovered, the Otherworld has its own time and seasons, often out of step with the seasons of the mundane world. Malcolm observes, "When he woke up it felt like a whole season later because he was warm, and the light through the leaves above was bright and sparkling. Leaves! There couldn't be leaves out, not yet! He blinked and rubbed his eyes, but there they were: leaves, and blossoms too" (*LBS* 438). In Malcolm's world, the calendar says it is late winter, but on the island, it is already late spring.

The island's only inhabitant, the lady Diania, appears young and pretty, with shining golden hair and a green dress. As exemplified by the Lady of the Green Kirtle in Lewis's *The Silver Chair*, green is the fairy color. Diania's name evokes two famous fairy queens: King James's Diana and Shakespeare's Titania.¹³ Alice is horrified to find Diania suckling Lyra at her breast. When Malcolm half-heartedly objects that the woman isn't doing Lyra any harm, Alice protests, "She's doing some magic or summing, I swear. You know the fairies, in stories? Well, they take human children" (*LBS* 451). Katharine Briggs writes, "The thing that everyone knows about the fairies is that they covet human children and steal them whenever they can [...] unchristened children, 'little pagans', are particularly liable to be carried off" (136). Briggs' reference to "little pagans" recalls Pullman's own description of Lyra in *Northern Lights/The Golden Compass* as "a coarse and greedy little savage," and highlights how valuable such a child would be to a fairy queen (33). Diane Purkiss explains that fairies

¹² In his early writings, Tolkien frequently used the terms "elves" and "fairies" interchangeably.

¹³ The fairy queen in King James's *Daemonologie* is called "Diana," while the queen is called "Titania" in Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, which Pullman quotes at the end of his novel, the queen is named "Gloriana," another name which may have influenced the name of Pullman's fairy queen, Diania.

"have an unnatural longing for babies, for mortal women's babies, and the reason for that is because they can't have any babies of their own, or it's difficult for them to do so" (Wood, et, al., min. 6:30). Indeed, Diania sobs bitterly, "I waited for a thousand years to hold a baby to my breast! But she's drunk my milk! She's mine!" (LBS 456). Purkiss says that British fairies, like the Mesopotamian Lamashtu or her Hebrew avatar Lilith, may produce unhealthy or even poisonous milk (Wood, et, al., min. 4:40). Lyra's survival into the *His Dark Materials* trilogy demonstrates that Diania's milk does not poison her, but Alice surmises, "It'll make her part fairy" (LBS 460). Sarah Zettel noted in a pre-*Book of Dust* essay, "Pullman never explains Lyra. Yes, we get the story of her birth, but she is never explained. Why can she and no one else read the alethiometer? Why do people fall in love with her so fiercely?" (45). Lyra's consumption of fairy breast-milk may go some way to answering these questions.

Malcolm points out, "We ate fairy food too" (LBS 460), and neither Malcolm nor Alice become hungry again hours later, as they normally should. The quelling of hunger from consuming enchanted food or drink is another motif employed by Tolkien with his Elven *lambas* in *The Lord of the Rings*, and Lewis in *The Voyage of "Dawn Treader."* Lucy remarks upon drinking the sweet waters of the ocean close to World's End and Aslan's country, "It's the loveliest thing I have ever tasted [...] We shan't need to *eat* anything now" (VDT 15.199, emphasis original). In the end, like Mael Duin, who uses trickery to escape from his fairy enchantress, Malcolm, too, must deceive Diania to escape the island with Alice and Lyra.

Another *immrama* motif is the undersea otherworld. Mael Duin beholds a beautiful country under the sea with roofed strongholds and a herdsman protecting "a drove of herds and flocks" (MD II 55–57). Brendan also spies fish "like herds lying in pastures" (O'Meara 53). Lewis's Lucy spies a young sea-shepherdess tending her flocks of fishes "Just like a flock of sheep" (VDT 16.203). Like Mael Duin, she sees an undersea city with the towers and pinnacles of a castle, and a royal hunting party of Sea People mounted on sea-horses (VDT 15.193–194). Tolkien's Rover visits the beautiful gardens and undersea palace of the mer-king. Pullman, too, employs the motif of the submarine world, but as a place of illusion and delusion, rather than wonder. The canoe plunges down a waterfall into a cavern "deep under the earth" which is lit "by the light of a thousand glowing lanterns" (LBS 469, 470). There the children come upon a verdant island lit by "large blossoms on every branch of every tree, glowing with soft warm light" (LBS 471). The island is dominated by a grand house, and a garden filled with elegantly-dressed people and a tree with golden pears. In various world mythologies, golden fruit is a frequent marker of the Otherworld, immortality, and enduring youth. In Greek mythology,

golden apples grow in the Garden of the Hesperides located in the western ocean. In Norse mythology, the golden apples of Iðunn keep the gods ever-young. The "golden apples of the sun" in W.B Yeats's Celtic Revival poem, "The Song of Wandering Aengus" (1899), endure until the end of Time. Mael Duin finds an island with many trees and "great golden apples upon them" (MD I 473). On the moon, Rover finds "little golden apple-trees no bigger than buttercups" (Tolkien, *Roverandom* 4.49). Although Malcolm's golden pears also suggest immortality, they hang in a garden of arrested development and self-delusion. Malcolm and Alice believe they know some of the people in the garden below the world, "And some of them are dead" (*LBS* 479). Later, a river-giant tells them, "That's the place where people go when they forget" (*LBS* 491). A fog-bound bank on the other side of the river hides "everything they ought to remember" (*LBS* 491). Pullman's golden pears, then, do not mark a golden land of eternal youth, but a false paradise where inhabitants while away the time in self-delusion. Malcolm and Alice discover their nemesis, Bonneville, there. It is not clear whether or not Bonneville is among the dead, or merely the delusional, but the sight of the *La Belle Sauvage* spurs him to resume his obsessive pursuit of the baby Lyra.

As the children escape, they convince a river-giant guarding the gates to the sunlit world to let their canoe pass through. Bonneville follows and confronts them just outside of London, on a hellish island with a creepy graveyard and mausoleum. Fittingly, it is a resting place for the dead. After their exhausting race from Oxford to London, Malcolm is forced to defend Alice and Lyra by bludgeoning Bonneville with the paddle from his canoe. This time, Bonneville does not rise again. Brendan and Mael Duin also encounter a number of hellish islands. At one such land filled with burning lava, one of Brendan's brethren is dragged away and burnt by demons. The Dark Island in *The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader"* seduces voyagers with the promise of making their dreams come true, but then terrorizes them with their actual bad dreams.

At, or near, the end of their journeys, *immrama* voyagers frequently encounter the earthly paradise. The worthy are welcomed to stay, while others are ordered to return home, representing the second half of the framework narrative in the mundane world. Brendan sails for seven years before he is finally allowed to enter the Promised Land of the Saints, where the righteous abide on earth until "the terrestrial paradise must be exchanged for a heavenly one" (Bray 183). Paul the Spiritual, the holy hermit who aided Brendan, is invited to remain, but Brendan himself is denied permission to cross a river bisecting the land, a river which evokes the River Jordan which the Israelites of the biblical exodus crossed to enter the promised land. An angelic guide instructs Brendan, "Return, then, to the land of your birth" (O'Meara 63). Back in Ireland, Brendan tells his monastery "everything that he remembered

happening on his journey and the great and marvellous wonders God deigned to show him" (O'Meara 64). As Bray observes, Brendan "returns with good news regarding the life to come [...] but [...] he had to witness God's secrets on the ocean first. Without the monastic voyage, the Land of Promise cannot be attained" (Bray 185). Mael Duin, too, relates all he has seen on his marvelous voyage. In Pullman's novel, just as agents of the Church smash and sink Malcolm's canoe, Malcolm, Alice, and Lyra are saved by Lord Asriel, Lyra's father, and spirited away in his "gyropter" aircraft. At long last, they are taken to Jordan College in Oxford, where Asriel is able to secure scholastic sanctuary for Lyra. The significance of crossing a river to reach Jordan College, as in the Brendan story, reminds readers of the River Jordan. Malcolm and Alice are not invited into the college. Instead, Lord Asriel tells them, "Go back to the Trout [. . .] and take up your life again. Tell no one about any of this" (LBS 542-543). Readers familiar with Pullman's post-*His Dark Materials* novellas—*Lyra's Oxford* (2003) and *Once Upon a Time in the North* (2008)—will recognize Dr. Polstead as one of Lyra's university professors in the future. So, Malcolm Polstead at least is destined for Jordan College some day, if not this day. At the end of *The Voyage of The "Dawn Treader,"* the mouse Reepicheep, like the hermit Paul, is deemed worthy to enter Aslan's country beyond World's End. Caspian, like Brendan, is ordered to return home to Narnia. Reepicheep tells Caspian, "You are King of Narnia. You break faith with all your subjects [...] if you do not return. You shall not please yourself with adventures as if you were a private person" (VDT 16.209). Aslan orders Lucy, Edmund, and Eustace to return to their home, too, where he can be found under a different name (VDT 16.216). Aslan tells them, "This was the very reason you were brought to Narnia, that by knowing me here for a little, you may know me better there" (VDT 16.216). As Brendan could not attain salvation without his voyage, so the children needed their adventures in Narnia to help them attain the heavenly paradise later.¹⁴ Aslan even tells Lucy that his country "lies across a river" (VDT 16.215). Assuredly, that river is the Jordan.

Like Brendan, Tolkien's Rover catches a glimpse of an earthly paradise—Elvenhome—from the back of the great whale, Uin. But Rover, like Malcolm, is urged to silence rather than the witnessing of Brendan or Mael Duin. Rover is told by Uin, "No one from the Outer Lands is supposed ever to come here; and few ever do now. Mum's the word!" (*Roverandom* 4.74). Rover's story emulates Mael Duin's in one key aspect, though: all that he has learned from his journey taught him repentance and forgiveness. At the last, Rover reconciles with his adversary when a prank he plays with the great Sea-serpent loses

¹⁴ Readers of *The Last Battle* know that Lucy, Edmund, Eustace and other friends of Narnia are, in fact, later welcomed into Paradise.

Artaxerxes his job. Rover apologizes sincerely, and the wizard apologizes for turning him into a toy dog. Artaxerxes then transforms Rover back to his normal-size and reunites the dog with his human family back in the mundane world. Mael Duin is also encouraged by the Hermit of Torach, a holy hermit similar to Paul, not to slay the man who killed his father, "but forgive him because God hath saved *you* from manifold great perils, and ye, too, are men deserving of death" (MD II 91, emphasis original). At the end of his journey, Mael Duin returns to the island fortress and offers the man reconciliation instead of revenge.

There is ample evidence that Lewis, Tolkien, and Pullman were emulating the medieval Irish *immrama* in these three children's fantasies. They all employ a narrative frame which begins and ends in the mundane world, but is largely concerned with a marvelous voyage to a number of Otherworld islands. Their voyages are initiated by crimes which result in temporary exile. A magical figure sanctions their voyages. All three works share some of the stock episodes of the *immrama* such as empty mansions supplied with miraculous banquets, holy hermits and model monastic communities, enchanted islands, and submarine Otherworlds. They describe barriers of mist between the mundane and magical worlds, golden fruit, earthly paradises, and circular journeys which end where they began.

However, the heart of the *immram* is the voyage as a metaphor for spiritual growth and redemption, a metaphor which distinguishes it from its cousin tale-types, the quest and the *aventure*. This is exemplified in *The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader"* by Eustace Scrubb, who begins the book (as Edmund calls him) a "record stinker": an eavesdropper, a taunter, and an unbeliever (VDT 1.3). But, in his transformed state as a dragon, and after his painful rebirth as a boy, Eustace redeems himself with helpfulness and steadfast friendship. People back home even remark, "You'd never know him for the same boy" (VDT 16.216). In *Roverandom*, Rover learns the consequences of anger, and comes to value being part of a family. Tolkien uses no overtly Christian references, but as a devout Catholic, all of Tolkien's works illustrate his Christian principles. Rover's encounters with wonders and marvels—including the glimpse of Elvenhome—may, then, be read through a Christian lens as a promise of wonders and marvels to come. His joyous homecoming with his human family may put readers in mind of another joyous homecoming beyond the circles of the world.

Although Pullman is an agnostic or an atheist—"The difference is one of perspective," he says (*Dæmon Voices* 438)—he also utilizes the Christian form of the *immrama*, although he largely subverts it. Malcolm steals supplies from the deserted pharmacy, but passes the moral test by leaving a promissory note. The "holy hermit" murders another to take possession of his stately manor, and

man fails to protect and provide for his guests. The *immram* model monastic community is overturned by Pullman into an order of sadistic nuns. Pullman's "earthly paradise" is Jordan College, a worldly institution of higher learning. Lyra may be welcomed there by a sort of grace (as the daughter of a powerful benefactor and subject of the witches' prophecy), but Malcolm will have to earn his way in through hard work and study. Then, unlike Eustace and Rover, who begin their journeys as self-centered characters and evolve into compassionate ones along the way, Pullman's Malcolm is compassionate and selfless throughout. He routinely helps the nuns of Godstow Priory as he helps his parents at the Trout. Moreover, he takes personal risks to rescue Lyra when he learns that Bonneville wants to abduct her. The major difference between Eustace and Rover—who leave their sins behind—and Malcolm—who ends his journey by taking a life in defense of others—is that Malcolm's *immram* does not transform him into a better person, just a less-idealistic, more experienced one who has been forced to make hard choices in an imperfect world. Essentially, Pullman hijacks the *immram* form to illustrate the challenges and rewards of improving the world we have, rather than seeking an unattainable paradise. Pullman has performed this sort of narrative sleight-of-hand before, approaching the Christian *Paradise Lost* of Milton in *The Amber Spyglass* through a secular humanist lens, "from a different moral angle," Pullman writes, "to tell a story in which Eve was the heroine" (*Dæmon Voices* 324).

Nevertheless, Pullman signals Lyra's status as future savior-figure throughout this novel via the complex and polysemous relationship between Lyra and the titular canoe, *La Belle Sauvage*. This relationship may be illuminated by the four layers of meaning described in *Dante's Epistle to Can Grande*: the literal, allegorical, moral, and anagogical. On the literal level, *La Belle Sauvage*—"the beautiful savage"—is Malcolm's canoe. Malcolm says that he named his canoe after his uncle's pub in Richmond, because "I liked the name" (*LBS* 87). Pullman, too, liked the name. He said in an interview, "Well I've always liked the sound of it, and I, I knew there was an old coaching inn, and before that, in the early seventeenth century, I think, there was an inn called 'La Belle Sauvage' in London" (Pullman, "Philip Pullman Interview" 5:29). Allegorically, then, the canoe represents Malcolm's uncle's pub (and the real-world pubs behind it). Yet, it also represents his uncle's pub's sign which, Malcolm says, depicts, "a beautiful lady, and she'd done something brave, only I don't know what it was" (*LBS* 87). On the moral level, the canoe itself is brave and chooses to aid the children in their escape. It is described in such anthropomorphic terms as a "sweet-natured canoe" (*LBS* 378) which moves "almost intentionally" (*LBS* 467), and as a "brave little boat" (*LBS* 539). Finally, on the anagogical level, both the canoe and the beautiful lady on the pub sign represent Lyra herself, who will someday do something brave (in *The Amber Spyglass*). The connection is

explicitly made by Pullman, who, in *Northern Lights/The Golden Compass*, describes Lyra as “a coarse and greedy little savage” (33). It is a phrase Pullman highlights twice in his essay “The Writing of Stories” (*Dæmon Voices* 27 and 30).¹⁵ Like the canoe, *La Belle Sauvage*, Lyra, the little savage, will one day convey others to safety, as she travels through the underworld and back out again into the light. Lyra will redeem humanity, not for the spiritual Kingdom of Heaven, which Pullman portrays as corrupt, but for the Republic of Heaven that she helps to establish in the material world. Pullman even likens Lyra to a vessel like Malcolm's canoe on the final page of *La Belle Sauvage*, when he juxtaposes an image of Lyra in the scholastic sanctuary of Jordan College against lines from Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*—

Now strike your sailes yee jolly Mariners,
For we be come into a quiet rode,
Where we must land some of our passengers,
And light this weary vessel of her lode.
Here she a while may make her safe abode,
Till she repaired have her tackles spent,
And wants supplied. And then againe abroad
On the long voyage whereto she is bent:
Well may she speede and fairely finish her intent.
(112.42, lines 1-9; quoted in *LBS* 545)

Furthermore, Lyra's given name in *The Golden Compass*—Lyra Belacqua, or “beautiful water”—is never explained there. But, here, it takes on the significance of a sobriquet following her fateful voyage in *La Belle Sauvage* in the same manner that Caspian and Brendan are known by the sobriquet “the Navigator” following their respective voyages.

The Irish *immrama* may be encoded with the same four layers of meaning. On the literal level, they are stories about a voyage on the ocean. On the allegorical level, they symbolize the journey through life. Morally, they describe a journey of discovery and/or redemption. And, anagogically, they are instructive of the soul's path toward salvation. For Christian authors Lewis and Tolkien, the *immrama* were not only to delight their child readers with visions of wonder, but also guide them toward correct behavior and spiritual transformation. Eustace literally transforms into a dragon, but his spiritual transformation into a person who can give and receive love is the more profound

¹⁵ Stephens notes a nominal connection between Lyra and the play, *The Indian Princess*; or, *La Belle Sauvage*, written by James Nelson Barker in 1808, based upon the Pocahontas story. Stephens writes, “One could also translate it as The Wild Princess, a description which can certainly be said to apply to Lyra herself [...]”

change. Similarly, Rover literally transforms into a toy dog and back again to a real dog, but the true goal of his voyage is his spiritual transformation into a puppy who can give and receive love, who can forgive and be forgiven. Pullman's secular humanist voyage also uses the *immrama* format to illustrate the journey from innocence to experience, although Malcolm's road is different, and separates the Christian views of Lewis and Tolkien from Pullman's more fatalistic beliefs. After Malcolm leaves Bonneville alive three times along the voyage, he finally kills the mad-man in order to save Lyra and Alice. Malcolm thinks, "*I'm not old enough for this!*" (LBS 515, italics original). Nevertheless, the choice falls to him and he chooses to bludgeon Bonneville with the paddle from *La Belle Sauvage*. Bonneville even taunts him to do it: "Go on, kill me, you little shit! Peace at last" (LBS 518). Pullman flips the lesson from Mael Duin's voyage on its head. Where Mael Duin learns to love his enemy, Malcolm learns to pity his. Where Mael Duin stays his hand, Malcolm strikes. Bray writes that the voyage to otherworld islands represents "the trials and threats to [the voyagers'] souls and the rewards which await them in the world to come" (176). If the final confrontation with Bonneville was Malcolm's trial, did he succeed or fail? Pullman has said,

The people I most value—and consequently the people my stories esteem most highly—are those who *do good things*, no matter what they believe or don't believe, no matter what they feel. It's better to have hatred in your heart, and yet do something good, than to have a heart overflowing with love, and do nothing. ("The 2002 May Hill Arbuthnot Lecture" 39, italics in original)

This may be why Malcolm is still found worthy of eventual entry into Jordan College, Pullman's analog of the earthly paradise. To defend Lyra from Bonneville and the totalitarian arm of the Church was, in this story, the greater good, for, as readers of *His Dark Materials* know, Lyra is destined to save humankind. Perhaps imbibing Diania's fairy milk transformed Lyra into a part-fairy, giving her the ability to read the alethiometer, to have people (and polar bears) fall in love with her so fiercely, and to fulfill her destiny. But none of what is to come in *His Dark Materials* would be possible without Malcolm's sacrifice here, without his decision to act.

All three authors use the narrative structure, motifs and stock episodes of the medieval *immram* to tell tales of young people experiencing personal transformation and growth. Lewis and Tolkien maintain the form's original purpose of depicting Christian redemption stories, and thus Eustace and Rover transform into more mature and loving individuals. Malcolm Polstead is already mature (for his age) and loving, and Pullman's purpose is different from Tolkien's and Lewis's. Pullman inverts several of the genre's episodes and

motifs, subverting the *immram*'s original purpose of preparing the spirit for the next world, opting instead to tell the story of a young boy learning to survive in this one.



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KRIS SWANK is a Library Department Head at Pima Community College, Tucson, Arizona, and a member of the Signum University faculty. She is a PhD candidate in English Literature at the University of Glasgow, and holds an MA in Language and Literature from Signum. Her essay, "*The Hobbit* and *The Father Christmas Letters*" appeared in *Mythlore* 123, Volume 32, Issue 1 (2013). She has also been published in *Tolkien Studies*, *The Journal of Tolkien Research*, and a dozen edited collections, including *A Wilderness of Dragons: Essays in Honor of Verlyn Flieger*, edited by John D. Rateliff (2018).